

Movie Makers

November-December 2004

Volume 14 No. 6

The American Motion Picture Society

Sponsors of the oldest continuing Film/video Festival in the world.

ELEGIA' ~ The making of a Thomas Martin Double Bass

Editor's note In this issue AMPS presents articles from the movie-makers whose works were recognized in the recent festival. Special thanks to Ned Cordery and Roger Garreston for their efforts in having articles submitted.

By Geoff Addis

Elegia' was filmed during the summer of 2002, but the story really began some 20 years earlier. At that time I was doing a sound recording of an orchestral arrangement of Bizet's 'Carmen' scored for the London City Ballet by its musical director Leonard Salzedo. This was to be a new production and we were all invited to the final dress rehearsal before the ballet com-

pany went on tour. Our five year old daughter Kate came with us and was entranced not only by the ballet, but by all the other activities happening on and around the stage. Like many girls of

that he thought she would be too tall. Years passed and Kate was asked at school if she would like to learn play the double bass as the double bass player was leaving and Kate was considered the most suitable person to take over because of her height. This was to lead to her studying Bass at Birmingham Conservatoire. We learned later that it was the visit to the ballet all those years earlier that had made her want to study music and become a professional musician. After Birmingham, Kate went to study further at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, her tutor there being Thomas Martin. Shortly after starting her career, Kate felt that she needed a better instrument and

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that age she wanted to be ballet dancer, but was disappointed when the choreographer said

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Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

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**George W. Cushman
Founder,
1909- 1996**

Matt Jenkins, Editor

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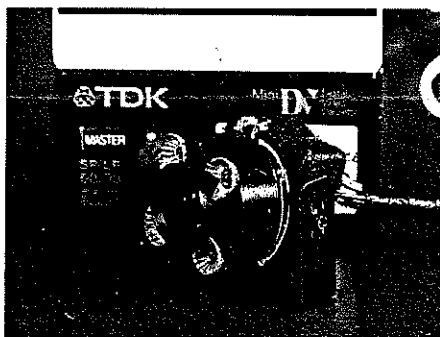
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MORE ABOUT GEORGE

By Jim Beach

For those of you who didn't see "My Name is George" at the festival or locally; it is a first person account of a sixty-some year old California Desert Tortoise. He has been our pet since 1952, is an endangered species, is registered and licensed and lives in our backyard where he has dug a burrow under the deck of the swimming pool. He will be hibernating there soon in his annual retreat, usually from October to March each year. I've been asked to tell you how I made the movie so here goes.



I wanted to make a movie that didn't tax my 86 year old bones too much and doing it all in my backyard seemed possible. The tortoise only weighs about 13 pounds and is about 15 inches long and he is quite docile. So I decided to make him the star and since my voice is a bit gravely I would voice over his lines so he didn't have to remember anything.

I wanted extreme low-level close-ups to make him look enormous and to detail his reptilian skin. For that purpose I used wide-angle lenses on two differ-

ent cameras.

A Sony TRV900 three chip digital camcorder was used for most scenes and was either used on a very low tripod or rested on a shot bag or the ground. Usually the star, George, was moved to the camera location rather than the usual camera to actor. He didn't mind.

The other camera is a tiny spy camera. Lens and all it fits in a 1" cube of space. It produces almost S-VHS resolution and feeds the data via a co-ax cable to the TRV900 for recording. It is powered by a 12v. battery-pack that I carry in my pocket. I made a ring light that fits on the lens body and has 4 tiny Maglight bulbs with reflectors. It is powered by another small 3v. battery-pack.

1"cube camera in front of a mini-DV cassette.

The tiny camera was mounted on the blade of a garden hoe for some shots so that I didn't have to get down on my hands and knees. For insertion into George's burrow, It was mounted on a short rod. That was the most difficult scene as I had to be on my belly reaching in the burrow while trying to view the screen on the camcorder beside me.

Without a tripod or stabilizing lens it was a bit shaky, so I steadied it some with the Steady Hand program in my Casablanca Kron editing system.

The opening and closing scenes and credits used a whimsical little mechanical green turtle that waddles across the screen as a background for the scrolling text.

Ann and Celeste: A Docudrama

By Joyce Axelrod

In 1999 Celeste, a friend of mine, told me about Ann, a friend of hers, who had a terrible eating disorder commonly known as anorexia. Celeste said that Ann had been on "death's doorstep" dozens of times over the past years, had been in and out of intensive care, in and out of residential care facilities and off and on welfare. At that time Ann was in a somewhat stable condition and wanted a video to be made about her in the hope that it might deter others from becoming susceptible to this terrible disease. Celeste knew I was an amateur videographer and had come with me the year before to the AMMA, AMPS, and TBW Convention in Orange County, California.

I agreed to just one visit with Ann, who was then in a residential wing of a local hospital. My personal concerns were that I could not do justice to a topic so serious. I did not want to make this eating disease seem uncomplicated, especially by extracting or summarizing essential elements that should be left to medical professionals. Additionally, there was a concern that I would be so profoundly disturbed with her appearance that I couldn't allow myself to make a fair video story.

The first visit was the worst. Celeste tried to prepare me say-

ing Ann was very thin but not emaciated as in the past. At the end of the visit I discovered that I wanted to learn more about the disease and try to help Ann accomplish her goal. My heart went out her her.

Over many months Celeste arranged for visits with Ann's primary doctor, her therapist and even an independent dentist who gave us a straightforward assessment of what he saw in her dental x-rays. Knowing that a camcorder could be somewhat disturbing during these examinations, I tried to be as inconspicuous as possible, so I did not bring artificial lighting

I lived with this project, off and on, for four years, filming Ann intermittently in her residential care facilities, hospitals and doctors' offices and during therapy sessions. I researched eating disorder websites, checked sources in libraries and talked with professionals. I revisited my footage many times, extracting the best in terms of sound, camera and lighting. I showed the unedited video to friends with the goal of them helping me to find a theme.

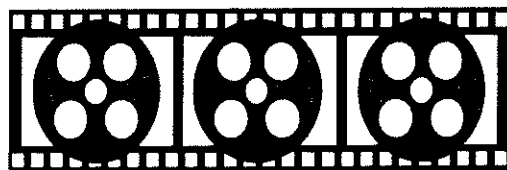
Almost everyone who saw the footage was fascinated by Ann's story, but the bigger question was why Celeste maintained her friendship with Ann over the years. I asked Celeste if we might explore this further. Finally we came to the conclusion that Ann's story would also be Celeste's story as Ann's caregiver over those many years. That's when I concentrated on showing Celeste's life as it was impacted by her friendship with Ann.

On January 16, 2003 Ann died. Celeste and I went to the funeral and we agreed to try to finish the video. It was still months later that I became passionate about finishing the project. I cut and edited, sliced and diced for days. I took my first edition to friends for further direction. More cuts, more edits

I used my Sony 1 chip TRV 10 that I bought about six ago and still serves me well. My editing was done on Macrosystems KRON. I discovered by accident the website Freeplay Music Inc and selected one melody that I felt set the right mood. Celeste did her voice over, when not on location, in my office using a separate microphone.

Knowing that the Moviemakers Convention in Victoria B.C. was soon approaching I made a version especially for competition. I didn't have strong hopes that it would be highly considered, so I was naturally very surprised and pleased that it garnered Best Entry by an AMPS member and the Oscar Horovitz Memorial Top Award by Amateur Movie Makers Association (AMMA)

My plans now are to further fine-tune the video using the judges' wonderfully useful comments and critiques. I will investigate submitting it to short film festivals around the US. I searched with Google and was amazed by the possibilities. This should be good news to other amateur videomakers in getting their works appreciated by wider audiences.

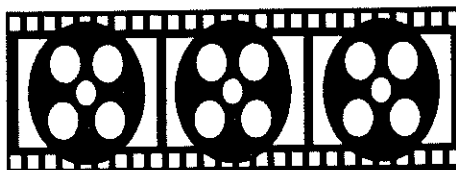


We Fought the Law

Phil Martin

We Fought the Law" was an altogether less serious film. It was great fun to make - working with other members of my club, Reading Film and Video Makers. I spent most of my career in the UK Department of Transport. During the 1990's I served for about 5 years as Head of Road Safety at the time when we were introducing fixed speed cameras. So I enjoyed taking an irreverent look at my own handiwork. Your members might be entertained to know that I was recently caught on camera - so there is some justice in this World! The filming had quite a number of entertaining moments. It is amazing to see how the public react to someone leaning out of a car window with a rifle apparently blasting away at a speed camera - they either pretended that they hadn't noticed or that it was an everyday occurrence! When we were apparently setting fire to another camera, a lady came out of her house to ask if we were from the local Council. When we said that we were she went on to complain about the inadequacy of the road sweeping - again seemingly oblivious to our apparent intent to cause criminal damage to police property! On a third occasion, I was at the roadside at about 5.30am with a camera on a hoist looking past a speed camera at the approaching cars. (This needed to be filmed early so that when a suitably fast-looking sports car came by, I

could speed up the film. This only works if the car in question is the only moving object in the frame; otherwise the shot is spoilt by high speed cyclists and the like). Well, I was crouched over a monitor at the roadside when round the distant corner came a very promising white car. But then I saw that there appeared to be some red on it... and a blue light on the roof! I froze, like a rabbit in the headlights, waiting for it to stop, while I rehearsed all the half truths that I could invent as to what I was doing. (I thought of explaining that I was making a spoof film but, in my imagination I could hear the officer saying "The Law does not take kindly to being laughed at, sir. Now let's see how many offences you're committing: interfering with the proper operation of law enforcement equipment, obstructing the footpath, parking on the verge..."). But, fortunately they too chose to ignore what we were up to. I suspect that the paperwork would have been a nightmare. I hope that you find these summaries helpful and I look forward to pitching a couple of films at next year's Festival. If you are ever planning a visit to England do get in touch. I would be very interested in learning more about amateur film making in the US. With Kind Regards



"Home"

Pat and Brain Deakin

The idea of making the video "Home" was originally to be part of a genealogy series, a record of our family history intended for the benefit of our future generations.

A visit to my home town in Yorkshire England in the year 2000 made it possible for Pat and I to tell my part of this story. We had it scripted before we left. We had prepared and planned exactly what we were going to do and where we were going to film. However, what we were not ready for was how beautiful and unchanged every thing would be.

The great thrill for us, is how other people have enjoyed the end product. What was for us a very personal undertaking and not something originally intended for public viewing. We only hope our great-great grandchildren will feel the same.

What is a Certificate of Merit?

In any competitive Festival there is always a small number of films that have special qualities but do not make it into the winning group, the judges want to recognize the filmmakers achievement so Certificates of Merit are awarded. In different circumstances or with different judges these films would have been winners.

The Holtman Brothers

HHi, my name's Tyler Holtman and I'm 16 years old and a junior in Oak Park High School. I'm involved with the theater program and our comedy improv team. In addition, I'm very interested in filmmaking and would definitely like to pursue it as a career. I've been interested in making movies since I was nine years old. Through the years, my parents, Brenda and Steve, encouraged the two of us to do what we were passionate about, and for both of us, it turned out to be filmmaking. The sad story that everyone is confused about for some reason why the two of us don't collaborate on projects together anymore. The truth is that we have two very different styles and there would be too many creative differences. However, if one of us needed a tip somewhere, I don't think we'd hesitate to ask.

By the way, our dad is a music composer and has helped us both out many times with the music for our videos.

The two films that I entered into the Ten Best of the West, American Motion Picture Society (AMPS) contest, and the Photographic Society of America (PSA) contest were "Unseen" and "Love Elusive." At the local recent 2004 Conejo Teen Video Festival, "Unseen" won Best Overall as well as Best Technical Achievement and Best Cinematography. "Love Elusive" was nominated for Best Screenplay and Best Actor.

"Unseen" is a 9-minute drama about a teenage photographer who is in search to be recognized by society. I made it from July 2003- November 2003. It stars Cosmo Stevens, who I knew through the theater department at school. Also involved is my friend's mom and my parents' friends. As you can see, I just used actors that I personally knew and the budget was around \$30, mostly for props. I just wrote the script myself, used my home video camera, had my mom drive me to locations, and used my home editing program, it's that simple.

"Love Elusive" is an 11-minute comedy about the trial and error of a young teenager's awkward love life. This was my first time ever co-writing a screenplay with someone, and it was my friend Ryan Schwartz, who I had just recently met through the theater department at school. Ryan also starred in the film, was an assistant producer, and composed some music for it. I was the director, co-writer, editor, cinematographer, producer, etc, etc. We made it from November 2003- May 2004. This was easier to find actors because the cast consisted completely of teenagers. The budget was also around \$30, all for props.

I just found out on Saturday that of the ten films chosen for the Ten Best of the West, "Love Elusive" was one of them, and it won the award for Most Humorous. This contest is open to anybody west of the Mississippi in the United States and the western half of Canada. Also, for the AMPS contest for student awards, "Love Elusive" won first place and "Unseen" won third

place. AMPS is the longest running film festival in the world, and this is the first year they've had a student section.

I was so honored that I won any awards at all for either of these movies. I've just been doing my thing and doing what I love, and for someone else to recognize that what I've been doing is good is so flattering, encouraging, and exciting.

A lot of my inspiration for my films comes from personal experiences or observing others. "Love Elusive" is loosely based on some of the people I know and their idiosyncrasies and experiences. I can also easily be inspired to make a movie after seeing one I really like and studying the techniques.

I'm highly influenced not just by my friends and my parents, but also some famous chaps out there. Including: Paul Thomas Anderson, Woody Allen, Wes Anderson, and the Coen brothers (Joel and Ethan Coen). No, Chase and I don't aspire to be just like the Coen brothers.

For any aspiring filmmaker out there, I would just encourage them to keep doing what they do and loving what they do. I'd suggest watching and studying all the great films and the not-so-great films and, most importantly, to make as many films as possible because that is where there are possibilities to learn the most. Listen to other's criticisms but at the same time listen to your heart and go where the road of life takes you, even if it makes turns or is bumpy along the way. -- Tyler

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This is from Chase:

Chase Holtman; Age 17; I live in Oak Park and I am a senior at Oak Park High School. I plan to go on to college and study film-making. My brother and I became fascinated with the family video camera at a very young age and soon began making no-budget movies utilizing our living room, garage and front yard as a set. As time passed, we got more serious about making films and made numerous small projects. Our garage brimmed with costumes and wigs (some really bad ones!) and our production company got its name: Badwig Productions. (We still use the name today).

In more recent years, Tyler and I have tended to work individually, entering our videos into local and national film contests. As I had experimented with stop-animation in the past, my first festival entry was a music video using clay animation called "Particle Man." Winning "Best Music Video" and "Most Original" awards for "Particle Man" greatly encouraged me.

My next major project was an experimentally humorous and avant-garde music video called "Fingertips." The video utilized a selection of very short, individual music tracks by They Might Be Giants, collectively titled "Fingertips" on their album Apollo 18.

My most recent project was a 10-minute drama-comedy called "Harptopia," which featured a dream sequence modeled somewhat after the surrealistic works of Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini. Although neither

"Fingertips" nor "Harptopia" were accepted to the Conejo Teen Video Festival upon my entry, I was excited to learn recently that "Fingertips" had received two awards in a national student film contest, and "Harptopia" was a finalist in the Photographic Society of America's contest.

Some artists whom I've been heavily influenced by include: Federico Fellini, Ethan and Joel Coen, Paul Thomas Anderson, and They Might Be Giants.

AWARDS:

Particle Man: "Best music video" and "most original" in the Conejo Teen Video Festival - 2002.

Among the 10 winners of the "Ten Best of the West" film contest - 2004

Fingertips: Second Place and "Best Experimental" in the American Motion Picture Society's Student Awards category - 2004.

Harptopia: Finalist in the Photographic Society of America's film contest. - 2004

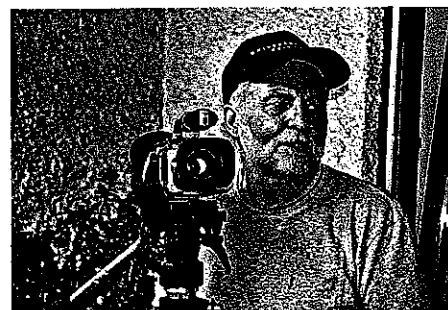
Gerretet (Rescued)

Certificate of Merit

by Oskar Siebert

This short film is a parody of vampire films that was inspired by a visit to a clinic where I saw a sign "Life is beautiful, donate blood and save lives". I wrote the script with my daughter Daniela, and when the script

was completed I drove across Bavaria with Daniela and my wife Ingrid looking for locations. Daniela designed the masks and costumes and recruited student actors, other props, the grave and the cross, I made from Styrofoam and a friend made the bat from paper.



The shoot took five nights; to help my friend and his 14 year old son joined us from the Czech Republic and my wife cooked for the crew and the actors. We used four 1,000 watt lights supplemented with the headlights of our cars when necessary. For the flight of the bat we attached the camcorder to a 12 foot vaulting pole and ran with the bat and the camera through the streets of Regensburg.

The edit was made using a Casablanca and the music composed by a friend and mixed to complete the project.

We had a showing of the finished film for the actors and crew and have entered it into a number of Festivals. (for more information visit www.videoaktiv-regensburg.de)

Translation by Alberto Kniepkamp.

(Continued from page 1)

decided to have one made by her former teacher. 'Elegia' is the record of that bass being made in Thomas' Oxfordshire workshop.

The making of the bass took some six weeks and I tried to be at the workshops to record the major stages in its construction. Of course, the three craftsmen were not working solely on Kate's new instrument all the time, others were being made as well. With all this work going on, it meant that space was somewhat limited and I decided that adding lighting would compromise safety. This meant that I had to live with both fluorescent and varying natural lighting.



Quite often the weather was typical of an English summer, dull and grey, but sometimes there was beautiful sunshine with cloudless skies. This all meant that there had to be quite a lot of colour correction in the final edit. Following colour correction for the differences in white balance I decided to slightly 'brown up' the overall image; this was an attempt to enhance the visual image to create the kind of atmosphere of the workshop that I felt when I was there.

My original intention had been to produce a longer documentary

with commentary by Thomas and his colleagues. Once I started editing I felt that the



visuals said everything, well almost, and that a more artistic and atmospheric result would be achieved simply by editing to music with no spoken word or location sound to intrude.

There are relatively few virtuoso works for solo bass and string orchestra, but 'Elegia', composed by Giovanni Bottesini (1821-1889), is one such work. I was fortunate in so far as Thomas had recorded the work some years earlier, but it had never been edited or released; Thomas lent me the original masters and I was able to edit these to produce the sound track for the video. Thomas has been principle bass player with many of the world's leading orchestras so I was very fortunate to have his co-operation in making this video.

The video was shot using a Sony DSR130 DVcam and edited using Edius (then Version 1.0), it was the first occasion that I had used this software. The sound track was edited and processed using Wavelab.

A couple of facts about the bass that might interest:

The front of the instrument is made from spruce and everything else, with the exception of the ebony fingerboard, is made from maple; all of the woods had been felled at least eight years earlier.

The thickness of the sides of the bass is less than a millimetre thicker than that of a violin.

Professional players who have heard this instrument say that they think it to be the best that Tom has made – perhaps the presence of a video camera had something to do with this. Kate is very happy with the sound and I'm more than surprised with the success of my first competitive video.

Finally, a rather interesting fact, the first time Kate played her new bass was at a concert at which, quite unknown to her, Leonard Salzedo's widow was the guest of honour at the premiere performance of a work composed by her late husband. It seemed that the clock had turned full circle!



UNICA and US

Ned Cordery and Mark Levy

W We have the opportunity to join UNION INTERNATIONALE DU CINÉMA NON PROFESSIONNEL (UNICA) as the official United States amateur movie making representative. UNICA is an organization that represents a large number of countries. The American Motion Picture Society (AMPS) is interested in partnering with AMMA on this venture. The annual dues are nominal (\$200) and the advantages are significant:

- 1) our members -- or at least some of them -- get a relatively convenient way to show their movies in Europe;
- 2) the U.S. gets representation in the international amateur movie arena; and
- 3) our members have access to amateur movies made by Europeans that they would not otherwise see.

You can learn more about UNICA by clicking on <http://unica.to/> Comments from our members, as always, are welcomed.

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Dues USA: (includes - Movie Maker)	\$ 10.00
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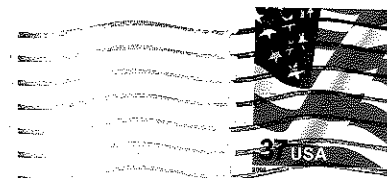
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